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Brazil

Biotechnology

Update of Biotechnology Issues in Brazil

2007

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Report Highlights:

Agricultural biotechnology continues to be a difficult issue in Brazil as government agencies, consumers, and environmental groups are divided on how to approach, conduct research on, and approve commercial applications for biotech products. These differences have kept the National Technical Commission of Biosafety - CTNBio from approving new biotech events.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Brasilia [BR1]
[BR]

Despite the approval of Brazil's Biosafety Law (#11,105 on March 24, 2005), followed by the signing of Presidential Decree (#5,591 on November 22, 2005), which implemented the new law, agricultural biotechnology continues to be a difficult issue in Brazil. Government agencies, consumers and environmental groups are divided on how to approach, conduct research on, and approve commercial applications for biotech products. The center of controversy is now the two-thirds vote requirement for approval of biotech events by the National Technical Commission of Biosafety (CTNBio).

CTNBio is a board of 27 members linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology (MCT). As per the above Presidential Decree, the Commission was extended from 18 to 27 members to include official representatives from nine ministries of the federal government, twelve specialists with scientific and technical knowledge from four different areas including animal, plant, environment, and health (three specialists from each area), and six other specialists from other areas such as consumer defense and family farming. Environmentalists and anti-biotech groups who are represented on the board of CTNBio are boycotting commercial approvals of biotech events, which affect the interests of foreign companies in Brazil, especially Monsanto. Also, because CTNBio must approve any request for imports of biotech products, such as corn, U.S. corn exporters are excluded from this market.

The Brazilian lower house has approved a draft provisional measure that introduces some changes to the Biosafety Law approved in 2005 and specifically reduces the required vote of CTNBio to a simple majority of 14. The purpose is to facilitate the approvals of commercial biotech events based on sound-science. The bill is now in the Senate and once approved will be forwarded to the president's office for signature by late March 2007.

The first CTNBio's meeting of 2007 (Feb 14-15) was concluded with no approval of biotech events due to the pressures of the environmentalists, specifically Greenpeace. The Commission got together in Brasilia to approve LL corn event from Bayer Crop Science and other events from Monsanto and Syngenta. A total of 10 events are in line to be approved by CTNBio (six for corn, three for cotton, and one for rice).

Meantime, Brazil had significant growth in biotech soybean area during the 2006/07-soybean crop. Brazil is now considered the third largest country in biotech crop area, after the United States and Argentina. The next major step regarding the development of biotech crops in Brazil will be the approval for commercial application of biotech cotton and corn. News on illegal planting of these two-biotech crops grows each day in Brazil's press.

On February 8, 2007 President Lula signed decree (#6,041), establishing a National Development Policy Plan for Biotechnology and created the National Committee on Biotechnology formed of 17 ministries and agencies of the federal government. He also announced his intention of investing 10 billion reais (about US\$ 5 billion) during the next 10 years. The plan calls for a national policy for biotechnology aimed at four main areas: human health, industry, environment, and agriculture and livestock. Criticism over this new plan mounted in Brazil's press because the President declined from citing the fund sources for this new plan and principally because it has not addressed the problems faced by CTNBio under the current legal framework to approve new commercial biotech products. Private companies are reluctant to invest in such legal framework.